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THE FIGHTING IN LEBANON

ANNCR: VOA NEWS ANALYST RONALD J. DUNLAVEY DISCUSSES THE SITUATION IN LEBANON:

VOICE:

UNTIL RECENT WEEKS, MOST OBSERVERS WERE PRETTY WELL CONVINCED THAT THE LEBANESE POLITICAL CRISIS WOULD BE SETTLED PEACEFULLY, AND THAT THE COUNTRY WOULD RIGHT ITSELF AND RESUME ITS POSITION AS COMMERCIAL LEADER OF THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN. IF THOSE HOPES ARE STILL HELD TODAY, THEY ARE FAINTER THAN THEY WERE. FOR THE SITUATION IN LEBANON NOW APPEARS TO HAVE ENTERED ITS MOST CRITICAL PHASE. CONCERN ABOUT THE WELFARE OF LEBANON HAS BECOME CONCERN ABOUT ITS ABILITY TO SURVIVE AS A NATION. AND THERE IS EVEN FEAR THAT THE LEBANESE CRISIS COULD TRIGGER ANOTHER MIDDLE AST WAR---A WAR WITH CONSEQUENCES BEYOND THE MIDDLE EAST.

THE MOST THREATENING SCENARIO IS THE ONE THAT WOULD INVOLVE ISRAEL AND SYRIA. EACH, FOR ITS OWN REASONS, IS DEEPLY INTERESTED IN WHAT HAPPENS IN LEBANON, AND EACH HAS ISSUED A STATEMENT OF WARNING. THE SYRIANS ARE PARTICULARLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY -- SUGGESTED IN SOME QUARTERS---THAT LEBANON MIGHT BE PARTITIONED INTO MOSLEM AND CHRISTIAN STATES. THE SYRIANS SEE THIS AS A THREAT TO THEIR SECURITY, AND LAST WEEK FOREIGN MINISTER ABDEL HALIM KHADDAM SAID THAT IF THERE WERE ANY ATTEMPT AT PARTITION SYRIA WOULD TAKE OVER ALL OF LEBANON. THE NEXT DAY ISRAELI DEFENSE MINISTER SHIMON PERES DECLARED THAT ANY SYRIAN INTERVENTION IN LEBANON, FOR ANY REASON, WOULD BE SEEN AS AN INVASION---AND HE ADDED THAT ISRAEL WOULD HAVE TO CONSIDER WHAT STEPS TO TAKE. A THIRD STATEMENT OF WARNING CAME THIS WEEK FROM CAIRO, WHERE A GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN SAID THAT EGYPT WOULD NOT REMAIN INDIFFERENT

TO AN ISRAELI MOVE INTO LEBANON. GIVEN THE ALREADY PREVAILING TENSION IN ARAB-ISRAELI RELATIONS, STATEMENTS LIKE THESE---EVEN THOUGH PART OF THE DIPLOMATIC CHESSEGAME---REFLECT THE ANGER INHERENT IN THE LEBANESE CRISIS.

ACTUALLY, THERE SEEMS TO BE LITTLE SUPPORT FOR THE PARTITION PROPOSAL, AND THE LEADER OF THE CHRISTIAN PHALANGIST MOVEMENT IN LEBANON---PIERRE GEMAYEL---HAS COME OUT AGAINST IT. IN THE VIEW OF MOST CAPITALS---INCLUDING WASHINGTON---PARTITION IS NO SOLUTION, AND FOREIGN INTERVENTION OF ANY KIND, FROM WHATEVER SOURCE, WOULD ONLY COMPOUND AN ALREADY TRAGIC SITUATION. THE BEST HOPE FOR PEACE IN LEBANON, IT IS FELT, LIES IN THE WILLINGESS OF THE LEBANESE LEADERS OF BOTH FACTIONS TO COMPROMISE. THE GOOD OFFICES OF CONCERNED ARAB NATIONS CAN ALSO BE USEFUL, AND THERE ARE PERSISTENT PRESS REPORTS THAT THERE MAY BE A MEETING IN DAMASCUS THIS COMING WEEKEND BETWEEN LEBANESE PRESIDENT SULEIMAN FRANJIEH AND SYRIAN PRESIDENT HAFEZ ASSAD---TO WORK OUT A PEACE FORMULA WHICH WOULD BE UNDERWRITTEN BY SEVERAL ARAB STATES. NEEDLESS TO SAY, IF SUCH A MEETING TAKES PLACE, IT WILL BE WATCHED WITH GREAT INTEREST. ONE THING IS CERTAIN: NO PARTY OR NATION CAN PROFIT BY CONTINUANCE---AND POSSIBLE WIDENING--OF THE LEBANESE CIVIL CONFLICT. IN THE REALIZATION OF THIS FACT LIES HE BEST HOPE FOR SETTLEMENT OF THAT CONFLICT.

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